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Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas Calls For One-Year Progress Report On Jail Construction Plan

Acting on a motion by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday called for a progress report on the county's Master Plan for replacing Men's Central Jail in downtown Los Angeles and for renovating Mira Loma Detention Center in Lancaster for female inmates.

They requested Sheriff Jim McDonnell and directed interim Chief Executive Officer Sachi Hamai to present the progress report at the board's May 19, 2015 meeting at the county Hall of Administration.

Almost exactly a year ago, on May 6, 2014, the previously constituted board voted to replace the half-century old Men's Central Jail with a state-of-the-art Consolidated Correctional Treatment Facility that would hold and treat inmates with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders, as well as those considered medically fragile or requiring high security.

The board also voted to convert Mira Loma, previously a federal detention site for undocumented immigrants, into a facility for female inmates.

Before embarking on what could be the county's most expensive infrastructure project, the board called for developing a cost-effective operational plan, timeline, and a report on how the construction would be financed.

On Tuesday, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said a progress report is due to the current board, stressing the need for transparency.

“We have a responsibility not only to build detention and treatment facilities that ensure public safety, but to build those facilities in public view, especially since the cost is projected to exceed \$1 billion,” he said.

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas observed that in the year since the board signed off on replacing Men’s Central Jail, criminal justice system reforms have affected the jail population.

AB 109, also known as realignment, raised the specter of overcrowding because it diverted felons from state prisons to county jails if their last conviction was for a non-serious, non-violent and non-sex offense. Proposition 47, on the other hand, helped reduce the jail population by downgrading several drug and nonviolent property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors.

Other reforms are still in the works, including Assembly Bill 1468, which would allow judges to split low risk inmates’ sentences between jail and probation, and Assembly Bill 624, which could cut low-risk inmates’ jail sentences short. Meanwhile, District Attorney Jackie Lacey is leading efforts to divert the mentally ill from jail into treatment.

“We cannot ignore the profound changes taking place in the criminal justice system,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “Given this shifting landscape, it would be prudent to take another look at plans made a year ago, and consider making adjustments.”

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